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A Guide To

FILING OF PAPERS

Principles, procedures, and techniques

FILING WORKSHOP

1959

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FILING OF PAPERS

1. Efficient Filing Techniques.

The process of actually putting papers into the files should be so planned and practiced that it will be accomplished without waste motion. Proper file drawer labelling should enable the file clerk to go directly to the drawer where the first paper is to be filed. The following steps should be studied for economy of motion:

- a. The filing shelf, with papers already attached, should be hooked onto the handle of the nearest file drawer to right or left of the one to be used (for right-handed persons, the filing shelf should be to the right; for left handed persons, it should be to the left).
- b. Note the file designation of the top paper to be filed. Look at the next few papers beneath to see if there are several to be filed together in the same folder.
- c. On opening the file drawer, note guide cards to determine approximate location.
- d. Note folder labels to determine specific location.
- e. If papers are fastened between cover sheets, lift folder half-way out of drawer, tilting the folder at an angle. Spread open the folder with one hand, remove contents with other hand, leaving folder still in its tilted position. Where loose filing is used, papers can be added without removing the contents from the folder, if the file drawer is not crowded to the point where this would necessitate forcing papers into folders.
- f. Transfer contents to filing shelf and add papers to be filed.
- g. Jog contents on edge to align them, if loose filing is used.
- h. Spread open folder with one hand and replace contents with other hand. Follow this motion through, pushing the folder back into its normal position.
- i. If papers are fastened to file folder, remove folder from drawer only after the folder in back of it has been tilted to mark the spot for replacing.

2. When To Fasten Files.

Fastening of papers to folders should be done ONLY when it presents definite advantages which offset the additional cost and time required. It is justified when -

- a. Papers need to be divided within a folder into temporary and permanent categories (example: official personnel folder).
- b. Papers need to be divided within a folder so as to provide immediate reference to a particular type of document (example: regulatory files containing notices of hearing, agreements, suspensions, amending orders, termination orders, etc.).
- c. Using offices call for and use all or much of the contents of folders, rather than individual papers from them.
- d. Papers are highly valuable or virtually irreplaceable and must be given every protection from the risk of damage or soiling resulting from handling.
- e. There is not much interfiling of papers.

When fastening in folders is justified, the advantages of using folders with built-in fasteners should be kept in mind. Whether built-in or manually inserted, fasteners should be used in alternate positions so as to maintain an even thickness of files in the file drawer.

Fastening of papers to facing and/or backing sheets during the filing operation likewise should be questioned from the standpoint of usefulness versus cost in time and money. It is justified under conditions c, d, and e above, plus the need for retaining the file folder because of additional papers to be filed while its contents are charged out.

When loose filing is used, papers pertaining to a specific action (for example, an incoming letter and a copy of the reply to it) should be stapled together.

3. File Drawer Sequence And Use.

A simple contribution to ease and speed of filing is the proper use of file drawers. Their sequence of use, exterior identification of contents, and volume of contents in relation to capacity, merit attention. With local circumstances and requirements given due consideration, the following general points should be kept in mind:

- a. As far as it is practicable to do so, the most current records should be maintained in file drawers which provide the most direct, natural access (third and fourth from floor). Under this arrangement, records of previous years (normally less active) will be in the less accessible file drawers. When this plan is used, drawer sequence is horizontal rather than vertical, when more than one cabinet is used.
- b. Types and status of records, subject categories, and date breaks should be shown on drawer labels. This information should be provided in bold, uniform lettering. Colors should be used to indicate date breaks.
- c. Sufficient room should be provided inside file drawers for anticipated expansion and ease of reference. As far as practicable, they should be maintained at four-fifths capacity.
- d. File drawers should be closed immediately after use.

4. Folder Arrangement And Use.

Selection of types of folders should be governed by particular needs. Factors to be considered in making this selection will be presented in a future publication in this series. However, from the standpoint of contributing to the ease, speed, and accuracy of filing, the following general principles apply:

- a. Folder labels should be uniform, both as to kind and the size and type of file identifications shown on them. The advantages of printed labels should be kept in mind in situations where a large number of file stations are involved.
- b. Folder tabs should be in direct lines, rather than in staggered positions. Where so-called full-cut tabs are used (those which run the full width of the folder), file identifications should be placed in a uniform position.
- c. Folders should bear date "breaks" whenever this is practicable. They should be placed in a conspicuous, uniform position. Folders bearing the most recent date should be in front of those bearing earlier dates.
- d. Folders should contain no more (and preferably a little less) than the maximum amount of papers for which they were designed. Conversely, folders should not be established for secondary and tertiary subjects when there is less than ten sheets of paper to be filed under them, unless it is known in advance that additional papers will be forthcoming. Up to ten pieces should be filed in primary subject folders.
- e. The scoring along the bottom of folders should be creased, as necessary, to adjust the folder to increased contents.
- f. Folders should be used as long as they satisfactorily serve their purpose; replaced as soiling and wear necessitates.

5. Guide Card Arrangement And Use.

As with folders, different styles of guide cards exist for various types of files. Those for alphabetical filing may be obtained in expandable sets ready for use. Those for subject files usually need to be arranged according to the particular file involved and must have tailor-made inserts (labels). General rules for their arrangement and use follow:

- a. Guide card inserts should be uniform as to size and type of file identifications shown on them. It is particularly desirable that the information shown on inserts be very prominent.
- b. To the fullest practicable extent, guide card tabs should be in direct lines, from front to back of file drawers, rather than in staggered positions. They should be so placed in relation to file folder tabs that they will not obscure information shown on folder labels.
- c. Guide cards should be provided only in the amount needed, since too many actually slow down reference. Thickness of files, strength of file folder stock and local circumstances should be taken into consideration in applying the following general standards for so-called correspondence files:
  - (1) When 2-inch expansion folders are used and file designations are prominently shown on the folder tabs, no guides may be necessary.
  - (2) When 1-inch expansion folders are used, one or two guides per drawer may suffice; 3/4-inch expansion folders, two or three guides; 3/8-inch expansion folders, four to six guides, inclusive.
  - (3) In the average drawer, one guide for every 10 to 15 folders should serve.
- d. The position and size of guide cards to indicate primary, secondary and case file sub-divisions of a subject file may be any one of a number, depending on the file system involved. A commonly-used and generally suitable method is to use third-cut, center position guide cards for primary subjects; third-cut, last position guide cards for secondary subjects and/or case files.

6. Auxiliary Equipment And Supplies.

Special articles of equipment and supply can further speed up the getting of papers into the files: a. Filing shelves free both hands for filing and hold papers next to the file drawers being used. b. Filing stools lessen the awkwardness and fatigue of filing into lower file drawers. c. Colored signals can be used to distinguish current-year file folders. d. Small supplies of new folders, fasteners, divider and cover sheets, rubber stamps, etc. should be placed so as to be conveniently at hand to the maximum number of users.

Call your AREA RECORDS OFFICER or the RECORDS MANAGEMENT STAFF when you have a records problem concerning special filing equipment, supplies, or systems.